



SWIMMERS

Directed By:		Written By:		Cast:		HBS User Ratings	
Doug Sadler		Doug Sadler		Bodine Alexander		2 reviews, 10 ratings ★★★★★	
				Jane Beard		Awesome 31.82%	
				Jim Chance		Worth A Look 63.64%	
				Charles H. Clyburn		Average 4.55%	
				Tara Devon Gallagher		Pretty Bad 0%	
				Kate Goehring		Total Crap 0%	
Our Reviewer Says:							
"Come have a peak at the lives in Cheasapeake." - Jason Whyte ★★★★★							

THE EFC REVIEW:

SCREENED AT THE 2005 VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL. I like the kind of film where we "drop in" on a family situation, sometimes even in the middle of what's happening. Sometimes, it doesn't work when we are explained things to death, where it is better to simply let us examine the goings-on of a family unit while it is happening and the descriptions make us aware of their past. "Swimmers" reminds me of a movie like Ken Lonergan's "You Can Count on Me", or "Lovely and Amazing" or this year's "Winter Solstice" where this kind of storytelling reigns supreme. And thankfully, so does this one.

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What's even more interesting is setting the action around our protagonist, an 11 year old girl named Emma Taylor (Tara Devon Gallagher). As the film opens, she has an accident in a swimming pool which causes major damage to one of her ears. This requires an operation in the big city outside of her Cheasapeake Bay surroundings. Her father Will (Robert Knott) is a fisherman who has just lost his boat in an accident that may or not have been due to his incessant drinking (one person close to him comments on this: "He's not an alcoholic. He just drinks too damn much.") and is losing money that is needed to help Emma. This also causes great strain on his wife Julia (Cherry Jones) who discovers that her husband may be hiding a dark secret.

Meanwhile, another character steps into their lives. Merrill (Sarah Paulson) is found in an empty pool by Emma's cop brother Clyde (Shawn Hatosy) and turns out that she used to live in this town years ago. She finds an interesting connection in young Emma and the two of them forge a relationship, much to the objection of Emma's mother, who finds Merrill too much for her. Merrill is too wound up, forcing a quick relationship with Clyde and offering him oral sex on their first date together. And throughout, Emma must cope with her family's downfall.

Water is a principle theme of the film, and how this element contributes to not only both horrors to Emma (when she realizes that she is not allowed to go anywhere near water due to her ear, it's a great moment that I have also experienced; how terrible it is to not be able to do something that you love so much!) and her father, but also to the rest of the characters. Merrill spends most of her time soaking in a bathtub, acting like a free spirit but not having the energy to maintain a proper relationship with anyone (the moment where she forces herself on Clyde, she gets rejected then winds up with her brother is a painful moment to watch).

I also liked the small town setting of Cheasapeake Bay, a part of the world that we don't normally get to see that often in cinema. Director Doug Sadler (who also wrote the film) takes advantage of the surroundings and gives us a bleak, watery look of a town that is surrounded by water. Mention must also be made of the widescreen image, which gives us interesting symbolism by the way of water and lighting; I liked one moment where Clyde is outside of the family home and Will arrives at the house in the extreme right of the screen, and another where Merrill makes an exit and disappears into the light.

This is a film that hangs on its performances, and thankfully we have a strong cast at work here. Robert Knott finds just the right note as the father; while he may have his problems with alcohol which may have led to that boat sinking, he still tries his best to be a loving father and we come to care about him. The always wonderful Cherry Jones (who is a Tony award winning actress as well as giving an unforgettable performance in Tim Robbins' "Cradle Will Rock") plays his strong wife Julia, and leave it to Ms. Jones to communicate so much intensity without saying a word (and when she does, it is equally powerful). Shawn Hatosy, who was really good in the 1999 film "Outside Providence" has some tough moments with Merrill, who is played by the wonderful character actress Sarah Paulson who played a secretary in "What Women Want" and nearly stole the show from Renee Zellweger in "Down With Love" and who really gets a chance to shine her dramatic chops here. She's the real deal.

As Emma, Tara Devon Gallagher's resume is an interesting one. When "Swimmers" screened at Sundance earlier this year, it was noted by many that Gallagher had another film playing at Slamdance (the festival's cousin), the wonderful documentary "Mad Hot Balloom". Gallagher was one of the main dancing competitors that the film, and I remember one particular scene where she intensely practices swing movements in front of her bedroom mirror that caused me to think, "This girl is going to go places." Her performance in this film is remarkable right from the get-go; supplying the film with sad, lonely narration ("Because of my ear, they think I can't see.") as well as being a quiet observer of the action, we really come to love Gallagher's character and hope things work out for her.

Sadler, a Maryland/New York based filmmaker who really understands his characters and gives all of them equal weight to the story. Some may find Merrill's character a tad underdeveloped, the resolution to the adultery aspect a bit slight (although I did admire Will's mistress line about the situation, where she cries "I have this problem where I am open to everybody!") and the occasional line of dialogue a bit too script-like for its own good, the problems are small at best. "Swimmers" is a fine and memorable film that understands the small town family unit and gives it respect, even if we are just seeing a small portion of everyone's complex lives.

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☆☆☆☆ (Worth A Look)

[Jason Whyte](#) - 09/20/05 14:21:19

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Chris	Beautifully simple	Awesome
susan everts	very well written, fabulous acting	Worth A Look
Carmen	Great film!	Awesome
richard marks	wonderful film, beautiful script, excellent cast	Awesome
Vanessa	Amazing.	Awesome
Sheri Lazar	Saw this today - it was rich, textured and incredibly moving - loved it!	Awesome
bernie fettkether	mike mosley was excellent	Awesome
Janet Marlow	Loved it	Awesome
Tanya Opilan	heart warming film, new comer Tara d. Gallagher is stunning!	Worth A Look

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